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STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics

August 17, 1970

Dr. Paul Ramsey
A. O. Smith Corporation
Box 584
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201

Dear Dr. Ramsey,

I have just received a copy of your Yale paperback "Fabricated Man" and I simply wish to express my appreciation for this production. I realize how imperfect some of my ethical speculations must have seemed to you. Apart from my own inherent limitations this derives from the rarity with which these matters can be discussed in any but the most superficial terms. Most of the debates that I have entered into on these questions have faced infallible problems of antagonism or ignorance, that is to say were quite incapable of reaching the fundamental issues. Your own dealing with these subjects is almost unique and I do find your writing a valuable inspiration to the sharpening of my own thinking.

Despite this preamble you will not be surprised if I still differ with you on a number of points, although some of these are still based, I believe, on residual misunderstanding. My allusion to the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not careless - is concerned very directly the responsibility that conscious man has for inquiring about and anticipating the consequences of his actions.

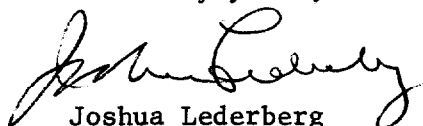
The point about which there is much disagreement and less misunderstanding you address on page 80, only to deride, - what you label the "archscientific value". This probably does reflect a basic difference in religious outlook, I might clumsily refer it to "Jewish scepticism" in contrast to "Christian grace". *(or Greek!)*

However, there is an element of style and function that I believe underlies your sharpest criticisms which may still be somewhat mis-directed. You fault me, I believe, for moral reticence. I have quite consciously refrained from making moral prescriptions intended to control the behavior of others. I certainly plead not guilty (quite the contrary) to endeavoring to conceal what is going on in the laboratories. After all, you probably would never have been stimulated to write this book except for the exposition of technical fact and possibility, that I have done my best to publicize. I do not criticize you for failing to make your work into a monograph on molecular biology. However, you have dealt with me with so much deeper understanding and generosity than almost any other moral commentator that I am much more thankful than resentful.

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What surprised me most of all were the two last paragraphs on pages 102-103. Why did you think my remarks disingenuous? I did finally come to a statement of what I advocated beyond what I thought was merely technically possible, and I will still adhere to an objective that I believe you share - making men healthier. One of my concerns is that our efforts in this direction may be frustrated by misunderstanding of the "master-race" variety. Where in my writing do you find any advocacy of operating on the human race? On the contrary, I have been much more generally faulted for refusing to endorse eugenic programs of one kind and another probably on grounds very similar to your own.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Joshua Lederberg', written in a cursive style.

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr

P.S. I will burden you with some further thoughts, informally, on the simple excuse that I do not have many opportunities for intelligent and critical discussion of these issues.

1. Your critique of my world-outlook, by line-by-line analysis, is the most searching and insightful I have so far experienced. It is disappointingly ad hominem in places-- and I say disappointing for two reasons. a) shifting the discussion to my own motives (e.g. whether I 'advocate' cloning) ends up being a rhetorical device to avoid a complete analysis of the proposal on its own merits. This is just what I meant by deploring the "accidentals" in the last sentence of my paper on experimental evolution

b) the reader does not have the advantage of seeing the connected text of what I wrote, the better to draw his own conclusions

c) you have not explored the range of my other writings as I believe you would have to do to understand the man you criticize.

2. To expand on 1c: did you not see that my root purpose is to advocate eugenics as the basic strategy to deal with genetic defect, wherever possible, as preferable to eugenics? My paper goes into great detail to discuss the difficulties of genetic engineering; you fault me for not simply condemning it out of hand. But this I refuse to do until we understand its implications far better than we do today. There are too many fashions in biological ethics (example, contraception as of 40 years ago) for me to agree that we can settle such issues so quickly. And this is also my "disingenuousness" in deploring the Mondale Commission. It would have ~~xxx~~ been charged to write durable prescriptions with unacceptable speed. We needed your book, and much more public debate like it, first.

3/ Do I advocate "cloning"? I just don't know. I could not advocate it today, simply on account of the hazards of inadvertent malformations. I introduced the question in the first place as a foil against the more aggressive proposals for genetic engineering; to say, let us think this one through first. If we reach the point where the genetic-accident risks can be ignored, and if some other reasonable human purpose were to be ~~xxxx~~ served in trying it out, I would need more persuasive arguments than you have written to make me condemn the experiment. At least, we already condone many more hazardous "experiments" in reproduction in the course of nature today. Such arguments may still be developed.

I would certainly condemn any large scale ~~adoption~~ adoption of any innovation with this potential, without knowing much more than we will soon.

4. Believe me or not, I strongly agree with your paragraph pp. 44-45 that the welfare of a particular child and family is the overriding interest. My remarks on this score have made me rather unpopular with my ZPG-oriented colleagues! As you already know, however, I am less confident than you are about the validity of any absolute prescriptions, particularly in fields where our scientific knowledge is both hazy and crucially relevant.

5. You misunderstood the intent of my footnote (v. your p. 82). I did venture a moral judgment about the role of communication as the touchstone of humanity. My footnote said that it would be arrogant of me to insist on this, or any other, prescription on a subject so enmeshed with the personal beliefs of my readers. In a previous paragraph, I had decried "the arrogance that insists on an irrevocable answer"....

This attempt at moral distance has not worked very well. In this field more than most I am challenged "if you're not for me you must be against me". I am still skeptical about pronouncements (and I think you do mistake ~~my~~ self-doubt for disinterest), but this has generated enough misunderstanding that I have made a few more than I feel comfortable about, in some later writing, hereinattached <Nobel Symposium 14>.

6. The closer we come to the realization of some of my earlier technical speculations, the more concerned I become about the subversion of genetics for racial-genetic purposes, and I would cling close to the theme of your p. 44 as a basic guideline. The pluralism that it implies converges with my own beliefs, though we reach it by different paths.

7. To your p. 78. You are right, I do not refer to any "moral limits" on experiments, mainly because this was not the subject of the article. Do you infer that I advocate unlimited license in carving people up for any whimsical reason? Did you not read my early (pre-Barnaard!) concerns about taking organs for transplant? Clearly, we need new lines of law to cover new situations, as we learn enough about them to understand them. I not place an absolute value on scientific experimentation; I am somewhat concerned now both about blatant abuses of human rights, in some cases, and a mindless invocation of them without real substance and to the detriment of essential social values in a few others. At the Mondale committee hearings, Barnaard was quite critical of me for suggesting that more than his personal judgment as a surgeon was needed for responsible process of decision about the availability of ~~xxxxxx~~ organs from a dying(?) donor.

Once again my gratitude,

Sincerely,